

CASE STUDIES



**YOUR ACCOUNTABILITY
PARTNER IN LAW FIRM
STRATEGY EXECUTION**

✉ leander.opperman@lokonsult.com

🌐 unlokconsulting.com



TRANSFORMING TEAM PERFORMANCE THROUGH STRENGTHS-BASED DEVELOPEMENT

In October 2022, our journey with Meyer Attorneys began. Their team was highly skilled, but collaboration wasn't reaching its potential. Working at full capacity in a high-pressure environment, the firm's lawyers often worked in silos, focused on caseloads instead of team cohesion. This limited shared learning and overall efficiency. What started as a CliftonStrengths® conversation evolved into a shift: from isolated work to a strengths-based, high-performing team.

The Challenge

Meyer Attorneys, a boutique property law firm, delivered excellent legal expertise. Their challenge: how to maintain peak individual performance while improving collaboration? Without a deliberate strengths-based approach, key opportunities were being missed.

- Siloed workstyles reduced efficiency.
- Team synergy wasn't fully leveraged.

The Approach

We introduced a CliftonStrengths®-based plan over three phases:

Phase 1: Strengths Discovery (Months 1-2)

- Strengths assessments identified synergy gaps.
- Team debriefs aligned talents with workflow

Phase 2: Strengths in Action (Months 3-6)

- Weekly strengths conversations added to meetings.
- Greater focus on collaborative problem-solving.

Phase 3: Adapting to Change (Ongoing)

- A key team member's departure tested resilience.
- The strengths culture reduced disruption and maintained morale.

The Results

- Stronger collaboration (internal feedback)
- Smooth handover during team transition
- Record-breaking Q1 2025 despite workload

One team member said: "We always knew we had talent. Now we're truly a team."

Conclusion

Meyer Attorneys proved that investing in your people is a strategic move. Activating strengths builds resilience, boosts collaboration, and drives sustained performance. Their transformation wasn't just about teamwork-it was about winning together.



In early 2022, the group CEO approached us to refine the strategy for a multi-faceted engineering group, which includes three companies: Iritron, a leading engineering firm with over 120 employees; Oculus, a control room solutions provider, and Referro, a distributor of electrical, automation, and software products. These firms primarily serve clients in the mining, pharmaceutical, life sciences, and food and beverage industries.

The Challenge

The challenge was to understand each company's financial performance and address strategic challenges that were holding the group back.

The Solution

We conducted a thorough financial analysis of each company to identify where profits were being generated and which customer segments were contributing to or detracting from the overall profitability. We then focused on understanding the core challenge facing the engineering firm. This analysis provided the firm's divisional managers with significant clarity, enabling them to design targeted strategies to address the company's key challenges.

The Results

The goals set for each division in 2023 were informed by a deep analysis of the firm's financials, and operational challenges, rather than assumptions. By addressing strategic issues such as skill-building and shifting from selling engineering time to selling comprehensive solutions, the firm was better positioned to meet its objectives.

Recognising the value of our strategic insights, the firm reappointed UNLOK in 2023 to assist with the ongoing implementation of their refined strategy.

REFINING STRATEGY AND GOAL-SETTING

Key Takeaway

Defining and addressing the core challenge, or "crux," is essential to effective strategy. By focusing on the crux, the firm was able to align its goals with its strengths, setting the stage for long-term success.

Update

In 2024, Oculus Innovations engaged us to support a critical leadership transition to new Managing Director, Reghardt Rautenbach. With a history of success under its former MD, Oculus needed a smooth and strategic handover to continue its growth trajectory. We led a session focused on unlocking the team's potential by analysing individual CliftonStrengths and mapping out collective capabilities.

By identifying core strengths and potential gaps, we worked with the team to develop strategies that ensured everyone could operate at their best. Additionally, we facilitated informal agreements that clarified expectations and provided the necessary support for each team member.

This collaborative approach not only enhanced accountability and communication but also inspired positive change. By focusing on strengths and fostering a supportive environment, we helped Oculus Innovations strengthen relationships, improve team dynamics, and position itself for continued success under Reghardt's leadership.



REFRAMING THE VALUE OF NON-BILLABLE ACTIVITIES

In mid-2023, UNLOK began working with a young director at a medium-sized law firm in Cape Town, who was in the process of carving out a niche in the insurance industry. While successful in his role, the director initially focused almost exclusively on billable time, undervaluing the importance of non-billable activities essential to long-term success. Recognising the need for a strategic approach, he sought guidance to optimise his practice development strategy and invest in his young team.

The Challenge

- Overemphasis on billable time with limited attention to non-billable activities.
- Lack of a clear, long-term strategy for practice development and personal growth.
- A generalist approach to legal practice, without a defined niche.

The Solutions

1. Reframing Non-Billable Time: UNLOK guided the director to recognise the critical value of non-billable time. Through a structured framework, he began to view activities like skill development, relationship building, and strategic planning as integral components of his practice. This shift allowed him to allocate time more effectively, balancing immediate client work with long-term strategic goals.

2. CliftonStrengths® Assessment: The director undertook the CliftonStrengths® assessment, which provided insights into his unique strengths. He discovered that one of his key strengths was being a “Relator,” a trait he had previously undervalued. By embracing this strength, he began a “listening tour” with clients, deepening relationships and securing new instructions. This newfound focus on relationship-building has since become a cornerstone of his approach.

3. Strategic Niche Development: With UNLOK’s support, the director shifted from a generalist to a specialist mindset. He developed a clear plan to become a leading expert in insurance law, identifying the skills he needed to acquire, the companies he should engage with, and the steps required to establish himself as an industry leader. This long-term vision is now guiding his daily actions and decisions.

The Results

Since engaging with UNLOK, the director has experienced a significant transformation in his practice. He now has a sustainable, long-term strategy that balances billable and non-billable time, leverages his strengths, and positions him as a niche expert in the insurance industry. His proactive approach to relationship-building has not only strengthened client ties but has also opened new opportunities, ensuring continued growth and success for both himself and his team.

Nienaber Attorneys

Nienaber Attorneys is a boutique law firm in Pretoria, known for its commitment to trust and exceeding client expectations. The firm offered specialised legal assistance across a number of practice areas. Their solutions-driven approach is designed to deliver practical, cost-effective results without compromising on quality.

In late 2022, Renée Nienaber, the firm's owner, reached out for help in refining the firm's strategy. At that time, Nienaber Attorneys offered legal services across more than ten practice areas. While the firm had expertise in various domains, Renée had a particular flair for deceased estates, property transfers, and drafting commercial agreements—areas where her passion truly lay.

The Solutions

Through a series of strategic sessions, we helped Renée identify and sharpen her focus on these core practice areas. It became clear that her long-term vision was to offer clients a specialised service in estates—an area that aligned with both her and her team's strengths.

The Results

As a result of this targeted approach, Renée now enjoys greater mental clarity and focus. She no longer feels overwhelmed by an extensive “to-do” list. Instead, she concentrates on the few key tasks that truly move her practice forward. By strategically saying no to non-core work, she has freed up time and energy to focus on her niche areas, enhancing both personal satisfaction and business success.

Key Takeaway

Choosing to say no to non-core work is both strategic and liberating. It allows a firm to focus on what it does best, driving long-term success and client satisfaction.

**DEVELOPING STRATEGIC FOCUS AND
MENTAL BANDWIDTH**

Empowering Directors Through Strategic Talent Development

UNLOK recently partnered with a medium-sized South African law firm known for its multi-disciplinary practice and personalised client service. Our engagement focused on strategically enhancing the firm's leadership capabilities, strengthening client relationships, and unlocking new revenue streams.

Identifying and Developing Unique Strengths

Working closely with three directors, UNLOK leveraged CliftonStrengths® to identify and develop their unique talents. This strategic positioning enabled them to differentiate themselves in a competitive market often dominated by “vanilla” service offerings. By understanding their strengths, each director was empowered to tell a compelling story that resonated with clients and set them apart from the competition.

Unlocking Productivity and Strategic Focus

One director, who had previously struggled with productivity and meeting his significant fee targets, saw a significant improvement in his productivity and fee performance. Through targeted mentoring, he unlocked his potential, now comfortably exceeding his targets while confidently implementing a custom-developed practice development strategy. This newfound clarity and focus allowed him to operate at his full capacity.

Maximising Non-Billable Time and Client Relationships

UNLOK also helped another director recognise the hidden value of his non-billable time. By leaning on his Relator talent, he unlocked two new portfolios of instructions from institutional clients, demonstrating the power of strategic relationship-building.

Achieving Academic and Professional Growth

In the midst of managing a busy commercial litigation practice, another director set a personal goal to acquire a Master of Laws degree. With UNLOK's accountability support, she successfully balanced her academic pursuits with her professional responsibilities. By leveraging the assistance of two young associates, she was able to achieve her goal without compromising her practice.

Deepening Client Relationships and Generating New Revenue Streams

In another instance, UNLOK guided a director in deepening her relationship with a key corporate client in the beverage industry. Additionally, by productizing a practice segment, she was positioned to generate a new revenue stream from this work, creating additional value for both the client and the firm.

Exploring Global Opportunities

Finally, UNLOK supported another director in gaining clarity on her value proposition and assessing the pros and cons of pursuing further academic qualifications. Leveraging our deep networks, we helped her to explore all her options, opening doors to extend her practice beyond borders.

Through targeted CliftonStrengths development, strategic mentoring, and, most importantly, accountability partnerships, UNLOK helped this law firm's directors unlock their full potential. The firm is now better positioned to differentiate itself in the market, enhance client relationships, and pursue new revenue streams, both locally and internationally.

STRATEGIC SEGMENTATION AND FOCUS

Three years ago, we had the privilege of partnering with Denis Leahy Attorneys to develop and implement a powerful business strategy that significantly transformed the firm's trajectory. Our journey began with a comprehensive segmentation and financial analysis, which revealed critical insights into the firm's operations.

Identifying Key Segments for Success

Through our analysis, we identified several unprofitable segments that were dragging down the firm's overall profitability. These segments, while contributing marginally to the firm's overheads, were not aligned with the firm's strengths or strategic goals. It became clear that focusing on these areas was not sustainable for long-term success.

Empowering Strategic Decisions

Armed with this data, we engaged in deep discussions with the firm's young professionals to understand their strengths and aspirations. This process led two team members to recognise that their purpose lay outside the firm, prompting them to resign. Although their departure cut the salary bill by half, it had no negative impact on the firm's ability to serve its clients in profitable segments. In fact, it streamlined operations and allowed Denis to refocus on the areas where the firm had a strong reputation and expertise.

Refocusing for Growth

With this renewed focus, Denis made the decisive move to close down the unprofitable segments. This strategic shift allowed him to concentrate on the profitable areas where the firm excelled. The results were immediate and impactful: Denis was able to increase his fees as clients recognised the specialised, expert service his firm provided in its niche field.

The Takeaway

This experience underscores the importance of being ruthlessly consistent in cutting unprofitable segments. Even if they seem to contribute marginally to overheads, their negative impact on overall profitability cannot be justified. By strategically focussing on areas of strength, Denis Leahy Attorneys was able to enhance its market position, increase profitability, and establish itself as a recognised leader in its field.

This case study serves as a reminder that true success lies in knowing where to focus—and having the courage to let go of what no longer serves the greater goal.



BARNARD

STRENGTHENING STRATEGY EXECUTION THROUGH ACCOUNTABILITY

The Engagement

In April 2025, Barnard Inc. partnered with UNLOK to support a select group of directors and team leaders as part of a pilot designed to enhance their practice development (PD) execution. This initiative emerged from leadership's desire to strengthen accountability and create momentum behind the firm's existing marketing and growth strategy.

The Challenge

While the firm had previously articulated departmental marketing plans and strategic goals, many professionals remained immersed in operational demands, limiting their ability to translate those plans into focused action. Strategic priorities were acknowledged, but implementation varied between teams. What was missing wasn't direction, but rather a mechanism to support daily and weekly execution, alongside a structure for individual accountability.

The Solution

UNLOK introduced its Account-a-Trak system—an accountability-focused execution system combining a weekly and monthly dashboards, personalised WhatsApp nudges, and micro-coaching sessions to support behaviour change at an individual level. Each participant worked with UNLOK to craft a tailored, AI enhanced one-page PD strategy in under an hour. From there, weekly focus sessions created a rhythm for taking consistent, strategic action aligned with each team leader's role, goals, and available non-billable time.

The Results

By the end of the two-month pilot, the average execution score across six active participants reached 64%. While this may appear modest in isolation, it represented a marked shift from previously ad hoc or informal execution rhythms. The initiative helped convert strategic intent into visible traction within a short space of time. Several team leaders made visible strides in business development, including new client-facing initiatives, strategic content launches, and renewed network engagement. Perhaps most importantly, key individuals reported mindset shifts around visibility, ownership, and the value of non-billable effort. The firm's marketing and leadership team also benefited from clearer BD data and increased alignment between strategy and execution at a departmental level.